

First records for South Sudan of African Cuckoo Hawk *Aviceda cuculoides*, Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* and White-winged Widowbird *Euplectes albonotatus*, and first sighting of Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora*

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Premières données pour le Soudan du Sud du Baza coucou *Aviceda cuculoides*, de l'Hypolaïs icterine *Hippolais icterina* et de l'Euplecte à ailes blanches *Euplectes albonotatus*, et première observation du Faucon d'Éléonore *Falco eleonora*. Trois espèces nouvelles pour le Soudan du Sud sont documentées, ainsi qu'une espèce dont la présence dans le pays était précédemment établie uniquement par télémétrie par satellite. Un Baza coucou *Aviceda cuculoides* a été observé à 45 km au nord-ouest de Nimule (03°54'N 31°46'E), Équatoria Oriental, le 11 mars 2012, et un autre près de Juba (04°52'N 31°38'E), Équatoria Central, le 25 mars 2012. Un Faucon d'Éléonore *Falco eleonora* adulte de forme sombre a été vu à environ 30 km au sud-est de Juba (c.04°36'N 31°46'E) le 24 avril 2011 ; des données télémétriques par satellite avaient démontré que cette espèce survolait le Soudan du Sud. Le même jour une Hypolaïs icterine *Hippolais icterina* a été observée à environ 25 km au sud-est de Juba (c.04°38'N 31°44'E). Deux ou trois Euplectes à ailes blanches *Euplectes albonotatus* mâles en plumage nuptial ont été observés à environ 5 km au sud-est de Juba (04°47'N 31° 36'E) le 28 juillet 2012, et deux de plus à environ 7 km de la première observation le 4 août 2012.

During my stay in South Sudan, from mid-September 2010 to early September 2012, I observed four species not included in Nikolaus's 'Birds of South Sudan' (1989) or in the ABC's checklist of the birds of South Sudan, published online following the country's independence in July 2011 (Atkinson *et al.* 2012). These are thus additions to the country's avifauna.

African Cuckoo Hawk *Aviceda cuculoides*

On 11 March 2012, I was watching birds on the banks of the White Nile (03°54'N 31°46'E) in Eastern Equatoria State c.45 km north-west of Nimule and close to the border with Uganda, in narrow riverine woodland backed by scrub and cultivation. At approximately 08.25 hrs, I saw a raptor that I could not immediately identify fly across the river towards me. Although light conditions were poor, I took several photographs that subsequently enabled me to identify the bird as an immature African Cuckoo Hawk (Fig. 1).

The bird flew in a direct purposeful manner and was about the size of a Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis*, with a rather small bill, a fairly long, narrow tail, and rather broad wings with 'fingered' primaries. It was largely earth-brown above, with off-whitish underparts and undersides to the flight feathers. The throat appeared whitish,



Figure 1. Immature African Cuckoo Hawk *Aviceda cuculoides*, 45 km north of Nimule, Eastern Equatoria State, South Sudan, 11 March 2012 (Mark Mallalieu)

Baza coucou *Aviceda cuculoides* immature, 45 km au nord de Nimule, Équatoria Oriental, Soudan du Sud, 11 mars 2012 (Mark Mallalieu)

the breast and flanks had distinct brown blotches, and the ventral region appeared unmarked. The underwing had a broad dark grey or brownish-grey trailing edge, and two narrow more or less parallel lines of a similar colour running centrally along the flight feathers, forming more irregular barring on the primaries. The pattern of the underwing-coverts was not noted in the field,



Figure 2. Adult African Cuckoo Hawk *Aviceda cuculoides*, Gondokoro Island, Juba, Central Equatoria State, South Sudan, 25 March 2012 (Mark Mallalieu)

Baza coucou *Aviceda cuculoides* adulte, île de Gondokoro, Juba, Équatoria Central, Soudan du Sud, 25 mars 2012 (Mark Mallalieu)

but appears to be rather uniform and possibly paler than the trailing edge to the wings in the photographs, which also reveal the tail to be pale grey or brown below with two broad darker bars and a broad dark terminal band just discernible. Fig. 1 also shows the suggestion of a crest, a very pale malar stripe, yellowish cere and rather pale eyes. Leg colour was not noted.

Immature African Cuckoo Hawks should possess a whitish supercilium, which I did not observe, nor is this feature visible in the photographs. However, the features that were noted are consistent only with this species (Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002). This is the first record for South Sudan. Nikolaus (1989) suggested that the species might occur and the distribution map in Brown *et al.* (1983) includes south-western South Sudan.

Two weeks later, on 25 March 2012, with R. Trewby, I photographed an adult African Cuckoo Hawk on Gondokoro Island (04°52'N 31°38'E), adjacent to Juba on the White Nile in Central Equatoria State (Fig. 2). This bird was seen for c.5 minutes in flight and was unmistakable. The uniform rufous underwing-coverts indicate that it was of the nominate subspecies *A. c. cuculoides*.

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*

On 24 April 2011, at c.08.45 hrs, T. Jenner and I were c.30 km south-east of Juba along the road to Nimule (c.04°36'N 31°46'E), Central Equatoria State. The weather was excellent, with a cloudless



Figure 3. Adult dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*, 30 km south-east of Juba, Central Equatoria State, South Sudan, 24 April 2011 (Mark Mallalieu)

Faucon d'Éléonore *Falco eleonorae* adulte de forme sombre, 30 km au sud-est de Juba, Équatoria Central, Soudan du Sud, 24 avril 2011 (Mark Mallalieu)

sky and little wind. We noted several European Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus* migrating north-west and decided to remain and see whether other birds of prey were also moving. Soon, we found a single falcon *Falco* sp., perhaps 1 km distant, flying at c.300 m altitude. The bird soared frequently as it moved gradually north-west. Although the image is very small in the photographs (Fig. 3), from these we were able to identify the bird as an adult dark-morph Eleonora's Falcon on the basis of the rather uniform grey coloration with much darker underwing-coverts, combined with the long wings and long tail (Forsman 1999). Sooty Falcon *F. concolor* shows little or no contrast on the underwing between the coverts and flight feathers (Forsman 1999). Grey Kestrel *F. ardosiacus* has barred flight feathers and a less elegant, shorter winged appearance (pers. obs.). W. S. Clark (*in litt.* 2011) subsequently confirmed the identification.

Nikolaus (1989) listed Eleonora's Falcon as likely to occur in South Sudan. Satellite telemetry has since confirmed that the species does overfly the country en route to and from the wintering grounds (mainly in Madagascar): at least eight individuals crossed South Sudan on their southbound migration and at least three on their return (Gschweng *et al.* 2008, López-López *et al.* 2009, Hellenic Ornithological Society 2012). One southbound bird passed just c.100 km east of the site of the April 2011 record,



Figures 4–5. Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*, 25 km south-east of Juba, Central Equatoria State, South Sudan, 24 April 2011 (Mark Mallalieu)

Hypolaïs icterine *Hippolais icterina*, 25 km au sud-est de Juba, Équatoria Central, Soudan du Sud, 24 avril 2011 (Mark Mallalieu)

whilst two adult females that left their wintering grounds in Madagascar on 19 and 23 April, moved north through Kenya and Ethiopia, then west-northwest across South Sudan c.500 km north-east of the sighting reported here. It seems highly probable that there will be further sight records of Eleonora's Falcon from South Sudan. In good weather many birds may migrate at high altitude and thus be very hard or impossible to see. However, they are likely to be brought down lower during heavy rains, which can occur from late April.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

Also on 24 April 2011, at about 16.00 hrs and c.25 km south-east of Juba in Central Equatoria State (c.04°38'N 31°44'E), T. Jenner and I were alerted by our driver, B. O. Peter, to an emergence of flying ants around a large fig tree *Ficus* sp. that was attracting many small birds. The most obvious were weavers *Ploceus* spp., but Black-billed Barber *Lybius guifsobalito* and Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* were also present. I noticed a warbler that I thought was probably an Icterine Warbler. Closer observation and subsequent examination of photographs (Figs. 4–5) confirmed the identification. The bird appeared slightly larger than a Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, with long wings, a long pinkish-orange bill and greyish legs. The upperparts were difficult to see as the bird was feeding high in the fig tree, but appeared olive-green. The underparts were pale lemon-yellow from throat to vent. It had a bland-

faceted appearance with a hint of a supercilium in front of the eye and a vague milky yellow eye-ring. Given the views and the detail in the photographs, there is no possibility of confusion with any other African or Palearctic species. Melodious Warbler *H. polyglotta* has shorter wings and is highly unlikely to occur in South Sudan as it winters in West Africa (Urban *et al.* 1997). This is the first record for South Sudan, and again was anticipated by Nikolaus (1989).

White-winged Widowbird *Euplectes albonotatus*

On 28 July 2012, I was birdwatching just east of the White Nile at Juba, c.5 km by road from Karpeto, Central Equatoria State (04°47'N 31°36'E), in park-like open *Acacia* savannah with long grass that was attracting flocks of Northern Red *Euplectes franciscamus* and Black-winged Bishops *E. hordeaceus*. Among these, I noticed a bird similar in size to the bishops, but mainly black, with a flash of white in the wing and a long tail, which I identified as a male White-winged Widowbird in breeding plumage (Fig. 6). I remained in the area for c.30 minutes and observed 2–3 males, but no females, although these could easily have been overlooked. The birds possessed the cinnamon-rufous shoulder patches of the subspecies *E. a. eques* (Craig 2010).

On 4 August 2012, I encountered two further males in breeding plumage east of the White Nile in similar habitat and within 7 km of the first records. I found no evidence of breeding.



Figure 6. White-winged Widowbird *Euplectes albonotatus* near Juba, Central Equatoria State, South Sudan, 28 July 2012 (Mark Mallalieu)

Euplecte à ailes blanches *Euplectes albonotatus* près de Juba, Équatoria Central, Soudan du Sud, 28 juillet 2012 (Mark Mallalieu)

Although Nikolaus (1987) mentioned that White-winged Widowbird is 'rare along the Uganda border' and marked its occurrence in one-degree square 4/32, he subsequently omitted it from his species list for South Sudan stating that it 'may occur in tall bushed grassland along the Uganda border' (Nikolaus 1989). *E. a. eques* occurs locally in the Jebel Marra region of Sudan (Nikolaus 1987) so the reference in Craig (2010) to its occurrence in west and south Sudan refers to that population and presumably to Nikolaus' original assertion that it occurs in South Sudan (Nikolaus 1987).

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